

# Thinking Outside The Books



## Strategies for Effective Dropout Prevention

Academic Success Center  
Columbus, Georgia

Sandy Denham - Principal  
Leslie Robertson - SVC Supervisor/Reading Specialist



## Description

The Academic Success Center (ASC) is a nontraditional academic alternative high school established to help students acquire the knowledge and skills needed to complete academic requirements and apply vocational training. Accredited by the *Southern Association of Colleges and Schools* (SACS), ASC maintains a low pupil / teacher ratio of less than 15 to 1. In addition to regular academic classes, ASC offers a wide variety of vocational courses and a modern computer lab utilized during regularly scheduled times for graduation test preparation, curriculum enhancement, and remediation. Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) is also an option through PLATO software used in the lab, as well as our *Secondary Vocational Connections* (SVC) Program. Students may also avail themselves to on-line courses offered by the school district.

The school operates through an educational format that effectively applies professional learning communities, an emphasis on nontraditional academic instruction, a heavy concentration of vocational training, and a full magnet school concept that requires application approval prior to enrollment.

In addition to the nontraditional high school, ASC offers:

1. *Secondary Vocational Connections* (SVC) ~ A dropout recovery program that allows dropouts over age 17 an opportunity to graduate in one year.
2. *Accelerated Transition Initiative* (ATI) ~ A dropout prevention initiative that places high-school-aged middle school students in eighth grade with options to earn as many as four high school credits by the end of the year.
3. *Ninth Grade Academy* (POD) ~ A dropout prevention effort allowing high-school-aged middle school students to enroll in the ninth grade and receive a unique intervention designed to establish a firm foundation for future high school success.

The purpose of this presentation is to inform participants of proven strategies and techniques for preventing potential dropouts and recovering those who have already left school before graduating. An opportunity to participate in a dialog concerning ways to modify existing programs to meet individual school based needs will be included as part of the seminar, and handouts covering program descriptions, implementation strategies, and evaluation results will be distributed. In addition, a Power Point presentation will contain slides and video that highlight the successful program components. Also a menu of requirements for replication of all or portions of these initiatives will be provided. A brief question/answer period will complete the session. The main presenter is Sandy Denham who has 32 years of educational experience. Before assuming the Principal's position at ASC eight years ago, he served three years as a Grant Program Consultant for the Georgia Department of Education.



### *Nontraditional High School:*

Students enrolled in the Academic Success Center in grades 9-12 work to earn a Career/Technology Diploma. In addition to the core academic offerings, vocational opportunities are available in the areas of Business, Construction, Public Safety, Family Consumer Science, Entrepreneurship, and Workplace Readiness. Teachers address diverse learning styles by incorporating innovative strategies into lessons. When students enroll, they must commit to completing the year at ASC. Following that year, they may return to their base school or remain at ASC. Typically sixty percent of the students return the following year. Current enrollment in the high school is 126 students.

### *Secondary Vocational Connections (SVC)*

SVC is a drop out prevention/recovery program. Students enrolled in this unique program must be at least 17 years old at the time of their enrollment and have six or fewer core academic credits. Acceptance in the program is based on an application, which includes an essay and two references, a score of at least 8.0-grade equivalency on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), and a successful interview with SVC staff. Students who complete the program requirements may earn a diploma in one year.

### *Accelerated Transition Initiative (ATI)*

ATI is designed to meet the needs of a population of high school age students who are currently enrolled in middle school. ATI students must have been enrolled in the sixth grade at least one year, be at least 14 years old, and are at risk of dropping out of school. These students are placed in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and instruction targets preparation for entering high school. Students are enrolled in one high school vocational course per term with potential to earn four credits by the end of the year.

### *Ninth-Grade Academy (POD)*

The POD is a new program developed for the 2004-2005 school year that targets high school age eighth graders and allows them to comfortably transition into a high school environment. Using the middle school concept and a team of three teachers, instruction targets basic performance standards through incremental lessons designed to provide a strong academic base for future success. These students can earn four credits per term.

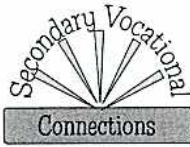
Academic Success Center

1112 29<sup>th</sup> St.

Columbus, Georgia 31904

Sanders (Sandy) A. Denham, Principal

PHONE (706) 748-2399 / FAX (706) 748-2401 / E-MAIL [sdenham@mcsdga.net](mailto:sdenham@mcsdga.net)



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Academic Success Center - 1112 29th Street - Columbus, Georgia 31904 - (706) 748-2399 - (706) 748-2397

SVC Applicant,

Congratulations, you have recognized an opportunity to make a positive change through Secondary Vocational Connections (SVC). In order to apply, please submit the following:

Student Application and Agreement (attached)

Student Essay (instructions attached)

Two Letters of Recommendation

These must be from an adult outside of the family (school or church officials, former employers, business professionals)

Please include a phone number for follow-up contact

Packets should be mailed or delivered to:

Leslie Robertson  
Academic Success Center  
1112 29th Street  
Columbus, GA. 31904

The attached letter to the counselor should be given to the guidance counselor from the school that you currently attend or from the last school that you attended. Counselors must submit:

- a copy of your transcript
- attendance tracker
- discipline tracker.

If you have any questions, please contact one of the following:

Leslie Robertson or Lucy Davis at 748-2397  
Sandy Denham at 748-2399



**ACADEMIC SUCCESS CENTER  
SECONDARY VOCATIONAL CONNECTIONS PROGRAM  
APPLICATION AND AGREEMENT**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Assigned School or School Last Attended \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Race \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Student ID # \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_

City / State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #'s (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (W) \_\_\_\_\_ Email address \_\_\_\_\_

The Secondary Vocational Connections (SVC) Program has been explained to me, and I believe it will best meet my educational needs and interests. I understand that if I am enrolled in this program, I have to successfully complete the requirements in order to earn a Technology / Career Diploma (Vocational). The program requirements for the SVC student are:

- Earn one Carnegie Unit of Health and Personal Fitness
- Earn one Carnegie Unit of U.S. History
- Earn one Carnegie Unit of Workplace Readiness
- Earn three Carnegie Units in one vocational area of concentration (at a mastery level of 80%)
- Pass the Georgia High School Graduation Test
- Complete 36 HTC hours (helping the community)
- Demonstrate competency in exempted courses through PLATO software and on assigned projects

I understand that because of the intensity of the SVC program, **REGULAR ATTENDANCE IS CRITICAL**. I agree to comply with all SVC attendance regulations, report to school on time, and attend at least a 180-day school year.

\_\_\_\_\_ student initial      \_\_\_\_\_ parent initial

I agree to comply with the MCSD behavior code and discipline policies. I agree to cooperate with the faculty and staff of the Academic Success Center if I am considered for enrollment in this program.

I understand that SVC is a last chance program. If I am withdrawn, either voluntarily or otherwise, I am **NOT** eligible to attend another public high school in Muscogee County.

Please indicate below the vocational area in which you will concentrate this school year. Mark a first and second choice.

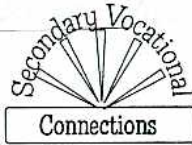
\_\_\_\_\_ Business      \_\_\_\_\_ Construction      \_\_\_\_\_ Public Safety  
\_\_\_\_\_ Health Occupations (females only)      \_\_\_\_\_ Cosmetology (females only)

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_

School Official's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Note: An average grade level score of 8.0 on the TABE is required for placement in the SVC Program.



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Academic Success Center - 1112 29th Street - Columbus, Georgia 31904 - (706) 748-2399 (706) 748-2397

Counselor,

\_\_\_\_\_, a student enrolled in your school, is interested in applying

student name

for admission in the Secondary Vocational Connections Program at the Academic Success Center. In order for us to process the application, we ask that you send us the following:

Transcript

Attendance Tracker

Discipline Tracker

Pony envelopes should be addressed to Leslie Robertson at the Academic Success Center.

Thanks,

Leslie Robertson

SVC Supervisor

## **STUDENT ESSAY**

Write a 4-paragraph essay according to the following guidelines. Applicants must write without assistance.

**Paragraph 1 – Introduce yourself**

Where are you from, and where have you lived? With whom do you live? What is your opinion of your neighborhood?

**Paragraph 2 – Educational Experience**

Where did you attend elementary, middle and high school? Describe the type of student you are; what you like and dislike about school, your favorite and least favorite subject, how you learn best.

**Paragraph 3 – Personal Story**

Tell an interesting story about yourself; perhaps something we should know about you. What issues or problems might interfere with your success in the program?

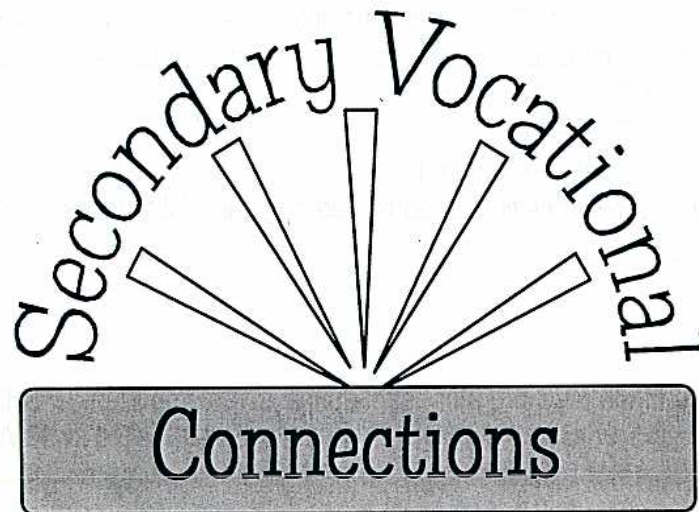
**Paragraph 4 – Life Goals**

Describe your future plans for education, career, family, etc. Why are you interested in enrolling in the SVC Program? Why should the committee select you as a candidate for this program?



# Handbook

For



at the

# Academic Success Center

## SVC STUDENT HANDBOOK

Congratulations on being a pioneer. You are one of only a few high school students nationwide who has been given this unique opportunity. In order to take full advantage of Secondary Vocational Connections, it is important that you understand the structure of the program and the requirements for completion.

A dedicated team of teachers and administrators will work with you so that your goals and the goals of the SVC program can be achieved. Although the SVC team will be there to guide you, it is important that you take responsibility for keeping up with your progress. We trust you will take that responsibility seriously and give us your best effort in all that you do.

### MISSION STATEMENT

SVC is an alternative high school program that provides students who have not been successful in traditional schools with a unique opportunity to earn their high school diploma. In addition to computer assisted instruction, students will receive vocational training and workplace readiness skills that will prepare them for employment and/or further educational training.

### PROGRAM GOALS

1. To facilitate the completion of the SVC requirements and the acquisition of the Career Technology Diploma.
2. To prepare students for post-high school success in a vocational technical school, employment and/or college.
3. To improve attendance for SVC participants.
4. To reduce tardiness for SVC students.
5. To reduce discipline issues in all SVC students.
6. To provide for the successful transition to adulthood and the skills necessary to be responsible, productive citizens.

### ATTENDANCE

**1. Absences** - Due to the structure of the SVC program, attendance is very important. For this reason, we encourage and expect all SVC students to attend school daily. **A STUDENT WHO HAS MORE THAN 10 ABSENCES PER TERM WILL BE DISMISSED FROM THE PROGRAM.** If absences were due to legitimate reasons such as serious illness or a death in the family, and **excuses are on file**, the student may reapply for the following school year.

**2. Tardiness** - All students are expected to be in school by 7:40 a.m. and in class when dismissed from the gym. Students arriving in advisory after the tardy bell will be marked tardy. If a parent has verified the student was tardy due to some circumstance beyond his/her control, the tardy MAY be excused. This decision will be left to the administrative team. **On the 11<sup>th</sup> unexcused tardy in a semester, the student will be withdrawn.**

### CONDUCT

All students in the SVC Program are expected to exhibit self-control and respect to staff and fellow classmates. All acts of misconduct will be handled on a case by case basis. Keep in mind the benefits of the SVC program and the commitment MCSD has made to provide this opportunity for students. We, therefore, expect SVC students to meet high expectations in regard to personal conduct.



## PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Each student will be monitored for progress in and compliance with all requirements of the program. These requirements include, but are not limited to:

- 1. Workplace Readiness** - SVC students are required to earn one credit in Workplace Readiness. The goal of this course is to enhance students' awareness of a variety of themes related to a successful job search, employment, job retention, work ethics, and co-worker relations. The WPR Coordinator will involve students in the creation of a career manual along with other projects and activities needed for the successful completion of the course.
- 2. Volunteer Service Hours** - Students are required to complete 36 hours of volunteer service with a **nonprofit organization**. Work assignments **MUST BE PREAPPROVED** by a member of the SVC administrative team. Contact names and phone numbers must be provided for all service hours. **ALL HOURS WILL BE VERIFIED.**
- 3. Plato Progress** - Students must demonstrate competence in all subject areas being exempted through SVC. Plato computerized instruction provides pretests and prescriptive subject assignments to be covered. In addition to computer assignments, additional projects, reading and research may be required to meet course objectives. Meeting benchmarks is critical to the completion of coursework.
- 4. Vocational and Required Academic Courses** – Students must earn 4 credits each semester, 8 total credits for the year. Students are required to earn 3 credits in one vocational area. Vocational options currently include Construction, Public Safety, Business, Cosmetology, and Health Occupations. Students enrolled in SVC who have not previously earned credit in US History and Health and Personal Fitness are required to enroll in these classes and earn a credit in each.
- 5. Portfolio** - Students are required to complete a portfolio which will include their Mission Statement, Career Manual, Resume', Volunteer Service Reflection, test scores, photos, and other items related to their SVC experience.
- 6. Attendance** – Remember, students with over 10 absences (excused or unexcused) per term will be dismissed from the SVC program.
- 7. Discipline** - SVC students should be positive role models in our school. Remember that if you want to be treated as an adult, you must behave like one. **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR ACTIONS.**
- 8. Georgia High School Graduation Test and End of Course Exams** – SVC students must pass all sections of the Georgia High School Graduation Test. Students must also take all required End of Course Exams unless credit for a course was received prior to enrolling in SVC.
- 9. Grading** - Students who take and pass the Georgia High School Graduation Test will receive a grade of 75/C in Basic Reading and Writing for the first semester. Students who complete 100% of their PLATO assignments will receive a 75/C for the second semester in Basic Reading and Writing. Transcripts will reflect a 75/C in all classes exempted through Plato. Because SVC students are completing their high school requirements in just one year, they are not eligible for the HOPE Scholarship. They are, however, eligible for the HOPE Grant. Typically, students receive an incomplete grade (I ) for the first term. This grade will change when all of the requirements have been met.



## EXPECTATIONS

Students enrolled in SVC are expected to:

- Come prepared to work with all necessary materials.
- Respect the rights and property of others.
- Follow all instructions and rules in a cooperative manner.
- Accept redirection and consequences with maturity.
- Use appropriate language at all times.
- Work hard in completing your program.
- Be proud of what you accomplish.
- Realize that we care and so should you.

The SVC team is proud to have pioneers attempting to explore, work hard, and reach their destination as a part of this new and exciting journey. We truly want each of you to succeed and fulfill your dreams. We make this commitment to you, we will do our best to help each of you find your way, but as it is in all things in life, it's up to you to do what it takes to make it happen. Good luck.

I hereby state that I have read and understand the contents in the SVC student handbook. I had the chance to ask questions in regard to areas where I needed clarification or further explanation. I feel that I now know what is expected of me and realize that the teachers and staff are here to assist me in completing the SVC program. I further understand the responsibility for my success belongs to me. I accept this responsibility. I hereby agree to abide by all of the expectations identified in this document.

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_